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*Light Bible Publications,
PO Box 760
Bexley, Kent
DA5 1UB, Great Britain*

E-Mail: Light.magazine@dial.pipex.com

Editor: Colin Dryland

Technical Editor: Roy Hinkly

Correspondence Secretary: John Lowe

Publications Secretary: John Cordial

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Books of the Bible

- Habakkuk

INTRODUCTION

THIS SHORT PROPHECY has an importance to Bible students that makes it unique and invaluable. Its importance lies firstly in the fact that it states the fundamental principle of 'justification by faith'. This wonderful teaching, the basis of salvation from sin and death, is expounded in depth in Paul's letters. [*Romans 1.17, Galatians 3.11, Hebrews 10.38*] However, it is not always appreciated that it stems from the Old Testament and goes right back to the fall of man in Eden. Adam fell from grace because of a 'lack of faith', so how reasonable it is that Adam's race should be saved from the ensuing curse 'by their faith.' Habakkuk states the principle explicitly. [*Habakkuk 2.4*]

Secondly, the prophecy deals with the problem of the suffering of the righteous, which is probably the most widely questioned and least understood aspect of the purpose of God.

Thirdly, in common with most prophecies, the book of Habakkuk has a message and warnings about future events that were not only vital to the nation of Israel prior to their captivity and exile to Babylon, but which also refer to a coming latter day re-enactment. [*Habakkuk 2.3*]

These three aspects alone make the study of this prophecy worthwhile.

THE WRITER AND THE TIME OF WRITING

Habakkuk whose name means 'embracer' is the only writer in the Bible to refer to himself as a prophet. [*Habakkuk 1.1*] From the form of the prayer in Chapter three one could infer that he was a Levite involved in temple worship. Nothing

else is known about him, though suggestions have been made that he was (a) the son of the Shunammite woman [*2 Kings 4.16*], (b) the watchman of Isaiah 62.6 based on Habakkuk 2.1, or (c) the rescuer of Daniel in the den of lions. The time of the prophecy is usually placed at the end of the 7th Century BC based on the reference to the Chaldeans. [*Habakkuk 1.6*] This would make him a contemporary of Ezekiel and Jeremiah and it is worth noting that if the minor prophets are in historical order in the same way as the major prophets, then Habakkuk is between Nahum (prior to the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC) and Zephaniah (prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC). That would put Habakkuk around the time of Josiah's death in 609 BC.

OUTLINE OF THE CONTENTS

The three chapters can be described briefly as follows:

Chapter 1 The burden or frustration of the prophet.

Question: How long shall I cry for help? [*Habakkuk 1.2-4*]

Answer: The Chaldeans will shortly be sent to punish Israel
[*Habakkuk 1.5-11*]

Question: How can God use an evil nation to punish His chosen people?
[*Habakkuk 1.12-17*]

Chapter 2

Answer: The just shall live by his faith. [*Habakkuk 2.2-4*]

Five warnings against aggression, self assertion, violence, inhumanity and idolatry. [*Habakkuk 2.5-20*]

Chapter 3

A vision of judgement to come written as a prayer and a Psalm.

Each chapter deals with fundamental aspects of God's purpose with man.

THE BURDEN OF THE PROPHET

Habakkuk lived at a time of great apostasy. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been destroyed some hundred years previously. Now the remnant of Judah,

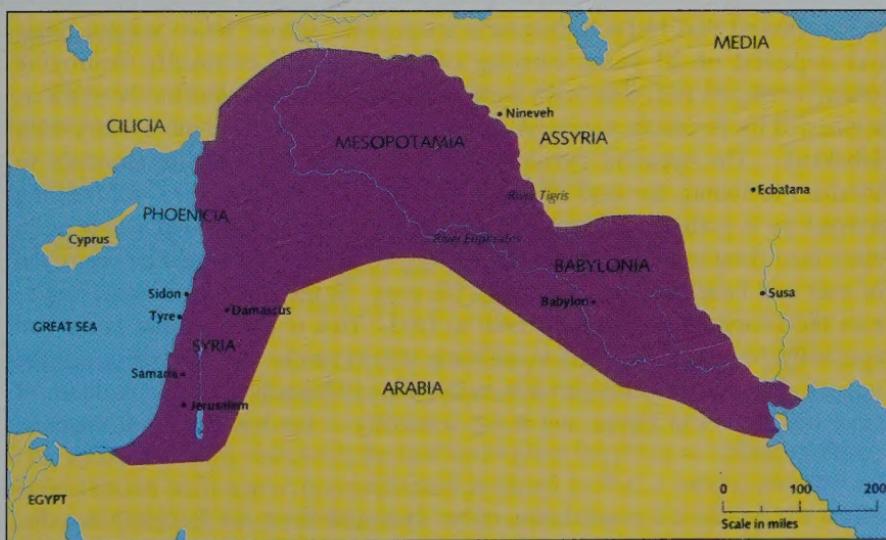
in spite of revivals under Hezekiah and Josiah were becoming increasingly violent and living in total disregard of God's law. So Habakkuk cries to God:

'O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!'

[Habakkuk 1.2]

This cry brings to mind the prophecy of Jesus where he declared that the kingdom of God would be established, when the world would be like it was in the time of Noah, characterised by violence and disregard of God's word [Luke 17.26]. The Apostle Peter also prophesied that this cry, '*Where is the promise of his coming?*' [2 Peter 3.4] would be heard in the last days. So too we could echo the cry of the prophet Habakkuk today, '*LORD, how long?*'. The answer of God, which applies equally to believers today as to the time of Habakkuk, was to those '*among the heathen*', who were the faithful remnant.

'Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.' [Habakkuk 1.5]



The Babylonian Empire that placed Israel in captivity

The 'work' was the invasion of the Chaldeans to punish Israel and to take them into captivity until the time of their restoration and return. It is interesting to compare the description of the aggressor [*Habakkuk 1.8*] involving leopards, wolves, horses and eagles with the other latter day prophecies of Israel's punishment and restoration. For instance, horses remind us of the words of two other prophets [*Micah 5.10* and *Ezekiel 38.4,15*] and eagles remind us of the prophetic words of Jesus:

'Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.' [*Luke 17.37*]

The Qumran commentary on the Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947, (see picture page 6 and Cover Picture page 15) linked the words of Habakkuk to events in the 1st century. This lends credence to Habakkuk being part of the Old Testament canon and also confirms the repetitive nature of God's dealings with Israel. Indeed the multiple application of prophecies to events at different times is one of the characteristics of the inspired word.

Having been satisfied that God would not delay judgement indefinitely, the prophet was further perplexed by the intention of God to use an evil and idolatrous nation to punish God's chosen nation of Israel. Indeed, subsequent events showed that Nebuchadnezzar's army came against Israel several times over a period of 20 years, carrying off captives and eventually destroying Jerusalem in 587 BC. The Jews were held captive in Babylon for 70 years as prophesied by Jeremiah, [*Jeremiah 25.11*] who was probably contemporary with Habakkuk. The apparent paradox of a nation that received the promises to Abraham including the land of Israel for ever, [*Genesis 12.1-3; 13.14-17*] being usurped by a godless adversary, is resolved by considering God's long term rather than short term objectives. In the long term Babylon would be destroyed for ever and Israel will be established for ever. In the short term Israel had to learn the lesson of putting their faith in God. This is a lesson that Israel had repeatedly forgotten and had to re-learn (for example see the period of the Judges). We see the same paradox in the use of Pharaoh when the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt, and in the scattering of the Jews by the Romans in AD 70.

That the lesson is a general one, rather than specific to the Babylonian exile, can be seen by the way the Apostle Paul at Antioch, quotes from Habakkuk, applying it to his own time, the 'work' of punishing the nation of Israel being

achieved by the Romans. [Compare Habakkuk 1.5 with Acts 13.41] The writer to the Hebrews also quotes from Habakkuk 2.4, (the coming of judgement when the just shall live by faith,) but takes it a step further in that it is linked to the return of Jesus Christ. [Hebrews 10.37,38] This therefore makes the book of Habakkuk relevant to future events. So the 'end time' of Habakkuk 2.3 is linked to 587 BC, to AD 70 and to the Second Coming of Christ. In each case a godless aggressor is used to further God's purpose but he is eventually destroyed. [see also Daniel 2.44, 11.45]

Again a paradox can be seen at a personal level in that God has arranged trials for individuals to form characters pleasing to Him. God produces perfection through suffering. This is an undeniable fact borne out by Jesus himself who was made perfect through the things that he suffered. [Hebrews 5.8,9] The importance of understanding this issue cannot be overestimated.

So Habakkuk stands on his watch-tower to await God's answers to his problem. [Habakkuk 2.1]

ETERNAL TRUTHS - CHAPTER 2

The second chapter contains God's answer to the paradox of using evil to produce ultimate good, and also includes the five woes or warnings against evil characteristics.

However, three verses in this chapter stand out from the rest in their importance:

Habakkuk 2.4 '...the just shall live by his faith.'

Habakkuk 2.14 'For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.'

Habakkuk 2.20 '... the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.'

As we have already indicated, the first verse gives the prime condition of God's reconciliation with man. It is explained in detail in Paul's letters, [see Romans 1.17 and Galatians 3.11] but it can be seen as the central theme of the Bible running through both Old and New Testaments. It was stated to Abraham, the father of the faithful. [Genesis 15.6]

The second verse gives the ultimate purpose of God which has to be acknowledged by all believers. [also to be found in Numbers 14.21, Psalm 72.19, Isaiah 6.3, 11.9] In Isaiah chapter 11 it is linked emphatically to the coming of Christ ‘a rod out of the stem of Jesse’ to set up a world-wide kingdom.



The entire commentary scroll on Habbakuk found in the cave at Qumran, is on display at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem.

The third verse is also important, stating, not only the need for humility in approaching the Almighty but also including the idea of God ‘dwelling’ with man. This is a part of the manifestation of God in Christ and the saints, which is another central theme of the Bible message.

The prophet declares that the information was to be posted for all to see. (the messenger was to run to declare it) [Habakkuk 2.2] The completion of God’s purpose is assured at the appointed time. The assurance of the eventual fulfilment of the vision (verse 3) is repeated in the New Testament. [Acts 17.31; Hebrews 10.37] The prophet is comforted by the knowledge that although the Chaldeans were being used by God, their evil ways would not go unpunished in the long term. In fact the Babylonian empire fell to the Medo-Persians in 539 BC before the 70 years captivity was complete. [Jeremiah 25.12] This was accomplished by Cyrus the Persian who was also a type of Christ. [Isaiah 44.28, 45.1-4] The same sequence of events was true of Pharaoh in Egypt. An evil

despot was used to turn Israel to God and was then destroyed himself by Moses, another type of Christ. [Romans 9.17] We see the repetition of the prophecy in the destruction of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Titus and eventually '*that man of sin*' described in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. [2 Thessalonians 2.3,4]

The five woes or warnings in the rest of the chapter are also directed not only at the Chaldeans but against all who exhibit the characteristics of aggression (verses 6-8), self assertion (verses 9-11), violence (verses 12-14), inhumanity (verses 15-17) and idolatry (verses 18-20). These are all prevalent in the world today.

THE VISION OF JUDGMENT - CHAPTER 3.

This prayer by Habakkuk upon Shigionoth (a term referring to the musical setting for use in temple worship) ranks with the finest of Hebrew poetry. The Hebrew comes in a sequence of three word groups but only the pauses are indicated in the translation by the word 'Selah'. The preface gives the author and the conclusion gives the instruction to the choir, as we also find in the Book of Psalms.

In common with other Psalms that are associated with historical events, it gives principles rather than historical details. So we can see in its language reflections of the whole working out of God's purpose from the Creation through the Exodus, the Babylonian captivity and on through the coming of Christ, the dispersal and return of Israel and the eventual setting up of the kingdom of God on the earth. There is a similarity in language with a number of the Psalms.

The words '*God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran.*' [verse 3] can be compared with the blessing of Moses on the children of Israel [Deuteronomy 33.2] and are prophetic of the second coming of Christ. The use of the past tense could indicate that the prophet is recording a vision he has already seen though the events are in the future. The similarity of Habakkuk verses 4 and 5 with both the cherubim in Ezekiel chapter 1 and with the rainbowed angel in Revelation chapter 10 suggest this link and the phrase '*the hiding of his power*' suggests something yet to be revealed. Teman and Mount Paran are both in the region of Edom and Isaiah prophesied that Christ and the saints will come from this region when the enemies of Israel have been destroyed. [Isaiah 63.1] Habakkuk's prayer therefore links together the Exodus, with his own time and the 'end time' or latter days. [Habakkuk 2.3]

This time linking characteristic is also seen in verses 5 to 11 with reference both to the creation of mountains, rivers, sun and moon; also drawing parallels between God's control over the elements and His control over the nations including Israel. So we read:

'He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered...' *[Habakkuk 3.6]*

In verse 12 we have the threshing of the nations related to the Armageddon of Joel chapter 3 and Revelation chapter 16. It will not be lost on students of Scripture that just as the Creation was produced by the mighty ones (Hebrew: Elohim) of God through His power, so the new Creation will be established by Christ and the saints. The prayer spans the whole of human history from beginning to end. A similar time span can be seen in verse 13 where the '*head out of the house of the wicked*' is wounded. This refers to the head of the serpent which was to be destroyed as promised in Eden *[Genesis 3.15]*, and to the fulfilment in Christ who destroyed 'sin in the flesh' on the cross. *[Colossians 2.14; Hebrews 2.14]* There may also be a link to Ezekiel chapter 38 where the word used for chief prince (Hebrew: Rosh) is translated as 'head'.

There are many similar ideas in this prophecy which take the reader forward and backward through the scriptures showing the inspired character of the words. For instance in verse 15 the horses walk through the sea and also the white horses of the saints and the seas of nations. *[see Revelation 19.14,15]* Again in verse 17 we have the fig tree and vine representing the nation of Israel, barren at the time of the prophecy and again at the time of Christ *[Luke 21.29; Luke 13.6-9 and John 15.1-6]* but due to bear fruit in the kingdom of God. In verse 16 the prophet refers to '*the day of trouble*' which we can immediately link to '*the time of Jacob's trouble*' used by his contemporary Jeremiah who goes into much more detail of the final redemption of Israel. *[Jeremiah 30.7 to 31.34]*

Having learnt that to have faith in God and to wait patiently for the coming Kingdom is the whole duty of man, the prophet ends on an upbeat note in which all believers can join:

'Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' *[Habakkuk 3.18]*

Richard Griffiths
Norfolk, England

Bible Truths v Popular Christianity

Jesus Christ the Son of God

IN CONTINUING THIS series on basic Bible teaching, we are immediately presented with a problem. ‘1st Century Christianity’ is easy to define: it comprises everything that was taught by Christ and his Apostles and believed and practised by the early church. It is described in the New Testament as *‘the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints.’* [Jude 3 RV] By contrast, it is almost impossible to define ‘popular Christianity.’

For many who call themselves Christians, there are no absolute standards of belief or practice. In general, all that emerges from church councils is the discordant sound of many voices expressing opposing opinions and from the pulpit, the uncertain sound of one voice having no authority. There are, of course, exceptions. Officially, the Roman Catholic Church for example, still maintains a firm standard in both doctrine and practice but increasingly its priests are questioning its doctrines and its adherents are ignoring its standards of practice.

There is however, one subject on which most theologians appear to be standing firm. This is the doctrine of the Trinity, although the way in which that doctrine is defined today, often bears little relationship to the classical creeds of the Church. So firmly is this doctrine held, that those who deny its ‘truth’ are generally labelled as anti-Christian or even heretics. At the same time it is freely admitted that it found no place in 1st Century Christianity.

A modern Bible dictionary explains the position clearly:

'The word Trinity is not found in the Bible, and though used by Tertullian in the last decade of the 2nd century, it did not find a place formally in the theology of the Church till the 4th century. It is, however, the distinctive and all-comprehensive doctrine of the Christian faith...It makes three affirmations: that there is but one God, that the Father, the Son and the Spirit is each God, and that the Father, the Son and the Spirit is each a distinct Person. In this form it has become the faith of the church since it received its first full formulation at the hands of Tertullian, Athanasius and Augustine.'

Later in the same article this claim is made:

'Although Scripture does not give us a fully formulated doctrine of the Trinity, it contains all the elements out of which theology has constructed the doctrine.'

We suggest that far more theology than Scripture has been involved in the construction of this doctrine. For example, of the three persons which make up the Trinitarian concept of the Godhead, the Bible dictionary states:

'There is perfect equality in nature, honour and dignity between the Persons.' (*quotations from article on the Trinity in The illustrated Bible Dictionary, Inter-Varsity Press, pages 1597-1599*)

Such a statement has no authority in Scripture; indeed, later the author has to qualify his words when confronted by Christ's unequivocal statement: '*My Father is greater than I.*' [John 14.28]

An essential element of the doctrine of the Trinity is the concept of Christ as 'God the Son'. Nowhere do we find such an expression in the Bible; it is theological, not scriptural. In the New Testament, Christ is described as the 'Son of God', not 'God the Son'. There is a world of difference between the two titles. Christadelphians are often accused of denying the divinity of Christ, thereby implying that they believe he was a mere man. This is a complete misrepresentation of Christadelphian teaching. He was the Son of God.

He was the Son of God by virtue of the way he came into being. The Christadelphians accept completely the Bible account of the virgin birth with all that it implies. This is more than can be said of some exponents of '20th century theology'. When the angel spoke to Mary about the son she was to bear, he said:

'...The Holy Ghost (Spirit) shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.' [Luke 1.35]

Jesus was the Son of God because he was conceived by the power of God, the Holy Spirit. There is not the slightest suggestion here that the Holy Spirit was the third person of the Trinity: it was '*the power of the Highest*'. Neither is there any suggestion that Christ existed before his birth of Mary. Trinitarians speak of God the Son entering the womb of Mary as a baby, but there is no hint of this in this simple record. All the indications are that after the miraculous conception, Mary experienced a perfectly normal pregnancy and that after his birth Jesus developed physically and mentally just like any other child [Luke 2.25].

The essential difference was that he was conceived, not by the instrumentality of a man, but by the power of God. As the angel reminded Mary: '*with God nothing shall be impossible.*' [Luke 1.37] '20th Century theology' seems to doubt that statement.

Such a conception and birth were essential steps in the development of God's plan to save mankind. Only a child conceived by the power of God, so that he was both Son of Man and Son of God (Jesus himself frequently used both titles), could do the work God planned for him. How simply Paul wrote of this remarkable event: '*When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman...*' [Galatians 4.4]

Jesus grew to manhood and at the age of 30 he had a remarkable experience. He came with many other Jews to be baptized by John the Baptist. As he came up out of the water, '*...he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*' [Mark 1. 10,11] Later the Apostle Peter referred to this incident in these words:

‘...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost (Spirit) and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.’ [Acts 10.38]

Such a statement prompts the question: if Jesus were ‘God the Son’, part of an eternal Godhead, why was it necessary for God to anoint him ‘with the Holy Spirit and with power?’ (notice Peter does not say ‘God the Father’ as a Trinitarian would have to)

Consider the next recorded incident in the life of Jesus, his temptation in the wilderness. In the letter to the Hebrews we are told that ‘*Jesus the Son of God...was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*’ [Hebrews 4.14,15] ‘*Jesus the Son of God*’ could be tempted to sin. But surely ‘*Jesus, God the Son*’, had such a person ever existed, could never have been so tempted. The letter of James states emphatically, ‘*God cannot be tempted with evil.*’ [James 1.13] But the temptations of Jesus were very real; he could have failed but he did not; throughout his life he overcame temptation, he ‘*did no sin.*’ [1 Peter 2.22] This was essential for the fulfilment of God’s purpose in him and doubtless this was why he was conceived as he was. His divine sonship must have given him a moral strength not possessed by any other member of the human race. But this strength asserted itself only after a tremendous struggle. Such battling against temptation would have been unthinkable in one who was ‘very God of Very God’ as the Nicene creed states. We shall return to this aspect of Christ’s mission later.

So far we have stressed the manhood of Christ. But, as the Son of God, he also displayed the qualities of his Father, so that John could write: ‘*we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,*’ [John 1.14] Paul could write: ‘*in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*’ [Colossians 2.9] and Jesus himself could say: ‘*No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*’ [John 1.18] He even said, ‘*he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.*’ [John 14.9]

In all these statements we can see the ready acknowledgement of Christ’s divine sonship; he was truly ‘*the only begotten son of the Father.*’ But there is not the slightest suggestion of the concept of ‘God the Son’. Jesus showed to men and women the character, the qualities and even to a limited extent the power of his Father. Because he identified himself completely with his Father’s

plan for the salvation of his followers, he could say '*I and my Father are one.*' [John 10.30] A little later he prayed that this oneness might be shared with his followers, showing plainly that this was not the Trinitarian concept of oneness [John 17.20,21].

God plans to reveal Himself in the future to all those who have been saved by the work of His Son, just as His character was manifested 2,000 years ago in the Son. Failure to understand the way in which God has manifested Himself in the past and will yet reveal Himself in the future, has led to the misunderstanding of many passages of Scripture. This is a subject which cannot be developed in a short article, but an appreciation of it provides the key to the meaning of parts of the Bible which have been given a Trinitarian bias.

Returning to the question of Christ's relationship with his Father, throughout his life Jesus acknowledged his total subservience to and dependence upon his Father. When one came running up to him and addressed him as '*Good Master*', Jesus immediately challenged his use of this title: '*Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.*' [Mark 10.17,18]

Consider the following statements made by Jesus:

'...my Father is greater than I' [John 14.28]

'I can of mine own self do nothing...I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.' [John 5.30]

'...the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.' [John 14.10]

'...the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.' [John 12.49]

'...I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.'

[John 15.10]

We notice the ready acknowledgement of his divine sonship - he was truly the Son of God. But we must also see how totally out of harmony with such statements is the idea of Christ as God the Son, equal to his Father.

Jesus accepted the will of his Father completely. But this acceptance was not easy for him. No part of the Bible record is more moving than the description of the closing scenes of Christ's life, before he was laid to rest in the tomb. We are compelled to ask the question: how can Trinitarian views be harmonised with the accounts of Christ's agony in Gethsemane and his death on the cross?

Think carefully about the following words describing his experience in Gethsemane. Christ prayed:

'...Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done...And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat were as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.'

[*Luke 22.42-44*]

The writer to the Hebrews adds these words:

'...in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;' [*Hebrews 5.7,8*]

If we add to those words, Christ's agonizing cries on the cross [*Matthew 27.46*] it is utterly impossible to conceive of such scenes being enacted between two co-equal and co-eternal persons in one Godhead.

Trinitarians claim that when 'God the Son' became a man he 'emptied himself' of the attributes which he had as the second person of the Trinity. This is sometimes called the 'kenosis' theory, the word 'kenosis' being taken from the Greek text of Paul's words in the letter to the Philippians. Unfortunately, some modern translations have, quite unjustifiably, translated his words in such a way as to lend support to this theory. [*Philippians 2.6*] Correctly translated, (see, for example, the Revised Standard Version) this passage of scripture affirms the unique position of Christ as demonstrated in passages quoted earlier in this article and shows how, despite this, he refused to claim equality, but humbled himself to be totally obedient to God, '*...even death on a cross.*' [*Philippians 2.8 RSV*]

Because of this, Paul continues:

‘...God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’ *[Philippians 2.9-11 RSV]*

Again, such words emphasise the unique and highly exalted position of Christ, but are quite incompatible with Trinitarian theology.

God’s whole plan for the salvation of the human race revolves around his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. But we do not honour God or His Son by exalting Christ to a position never granted by his Father and never claimed by himself.

We conclude with a quotation from Paul’s writings, in which he sets out the closing stages of the realisation of God’s plan to bring all the world into submission to Him through the work of His Son at his second coming. In the final stage, all the power and glory given to Christ by his Father will be yielded up to Him again. The work of the Son of God, foreordained by God from the beginning of creation and put into operation at his birth 2,000 years ago, will have been completed:

‘Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death. For, He put all things in subjection under his feet. But when he saith, All things are put in subjection, it is evident that he is excepted who did subject all things unto him. And when all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all.’

[1 Corinthians 15.24-28 RV]

Eric Toms
Norfolk, England

COVER PICTURE

THE DISCOVERY OF the Dead Sea scrolls is one of the greatest archaeological finds of all time and for students of the Bible, the most important hoard of ancient writings ever discovered. The scrolls survived undisturbed in the caves at Qumran for almost 2,000 years.*

Our cover picture was taken at the Wadi Qumran, which runs into the Dead Sea. In the background are some of the caves where many fragments of scrolls were found in 1952. These fragments contained parts of every book of the Old Testament, except the book of Esther. Until the discovery of the scrolls in 1947 onwards, the earliest known Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament dated from the 10th century AD. The Dead Sea scrolls found at Qumran however were around 1,000 years older.

Generally speaking there is little difference between the earlier and the later writings. This gives us confidence that the Bible we hold in our hands today is virtually unchanged despite the long period that has elapsed since these manuscripts were written. We believe this is not the work of unaided men but has been overruled by the hand of God who inspired the writers to pen the words of Scripture in the first place. The Apostle Peter reminds us of this great truth in his second letter where we read '*prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*' [2 Peter 1.21 NKJV] The Apostle Paul confirms this in his 2nd letter to Timothy in the words '*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...*' [2 Timothy 3.16]

The original writers were therefore divinely inspired but the copyists were not. Therefore allowance has to be made for minor changes in the text. The copyists work was however, checked very carefully and errors were detected and corrected. Some of these corrections can clearly be seen in the famous Qumran scroll of Isaiah. The religious Jews who lived in this settlement disappeared when the Roman armies subdued a Jewish rebellion in the 1st century AD. However their painstaking work remained for the next 2,000 years, a testimony to the reliability of God's word as we can read in the scroll of Isaiah:

'All flesh is grass, And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. the grass withers, the flower fades. But the word of our God stands for ever.' [Isaiah 40.6,8 NKJV]

EDITOR

* (See FREE offer for this subject on Page 24)

Millennium Update



THIS IS THE second 'Millennium Update' article since the Millennium issue was published (see September/October 1998). This appears to have generated a great deal of interest among our readers. As we said in our previous update introduction, the purpose is to highlight some of the Biblical 'signs of the times' which are associated with the end of the sixth Millennium.

In the first 'Millennium Update' article, (March/April 1999) we commented upon the fact that at the time of the return of Christ to the earth, at the end of the sixth millennial period, there would be a time of great trouble. This was anticipated as a result of many situations now developing in the world at large, which are in keeping with future events foretold in Bible prophecy. For instance, the prophecies clearly speak of a northern group of nations, sweeping down into the Middle East, principally against Israel in the '*latter days*'. This phrase is used frequently throughout the Old Testament primarily to indicate a time **after** the Jews have been restored to the land of Israel. These prophecies make it clear that this attack will be led by a nation called 'Rosh,' which is a Hebrew word describing the area we know today as Russia.

Now we accept that the immediate response to that suggestion may well be that, since the break up of the Soviet Union, the 'cold war' between the Western nations and the Eastern bloc has ended. Also, Russia's conversion to a market economy is very dependent upon the financial assistance of the West, etc, etc. However, if we consider the events of the past six months or so, world events have moved on sufficiently to place a question mark over that line of reasoning.

THE BEGINNING OF THE TIME OF TROUBLE

Following a long-running dispute between the United Nations inspection teams and Iraq, it was discovered that contrary to the destruction of arms, Iraq was

continuing to develop chemical and biological weapons. As a result of pulling the U.N. inspection teams out, the sanctions which had been applied following the Kuwait invasion, were left in place. Shortly afterwards, America and Britain mounted further action which is still in operation, under the code name of Desert Fox. The loudest protest came from Russia who desperately want to resume trade with the Iraqis, especially after a Russian transport plane en route to Iraq was intercepted at Azerbaijan carrying 23 MIG jet engines and 30 technicians, arranged in direct breach of the U.N. sanctions. The Russians had earlier in the year denied signing a \$150 million arms deal with Saddam Hussein.

The Balkans, the most recent trouble spot, saw aerial attacks being waged by NATO forces against Serbia in an endeavour to deter them from continuing the atrocities being committed against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The threat of possible military retaliation came from Russia again, which might become reality if Kosovo is to be placed under NATO military occupation and thereby become a 'protectorate.' It is accepted that these statements were made with fundamental issues of internal politics in mind and a fear of the spread of the NATO alliance encompassing former Soviet bloc countries. Nevertheless, the about turn of Russia to an anti-western stance is a real possibility.

Is it a coincidence that a week before the NATO action against Serbia began, an alliance between Serbia and Iraq was signed, based upon how to shoot down military aircraft overflying their countries? The delegation followed an earlier visit by Ivan Ivanovich, a Serbian chemical and biological weapons expert who had extensively toured Iraq's military facilities. What is more intriguing is the alliance with a so-called 'Christian' leader who is discriminating against Iraq's fellow Muslims!

NATO is being led at the time of writing by the Americans and the British, who have been dubbed the 'World's Policeman' by the popular press. Is it this aspect of the aggressive actions being taken in certain areas of the world against sovereign nations that worries Russian and other world leaders?

PROBLEMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Most people would agree that another potential flash point in the world is the Middle East. The Israeli/Palestinian peace talks and implementation of the Wye agreement is at stalemate, with President Yasser Arafat intending to declare a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital city. Israel has stated that Jerusalem is their capital city and will never be relinquished. This provoked a

vehement warning by Israel, when the European Union some weeks later in February 1999, advocated that Jerusalem was still considered an international city, in accordance with the United Nations resolution number 181. Even the Americans, Israel's staunchest allies, have become irritated by their intransigent attitude.

From without, Israel is surrounded by Arab neighbours, many of whom, whilst maintaining a tacit form of peaceful coexistence, are supporting and financing guerilla warfare and attacks upon her. Syria wants the Golan heights returned, which Israel is resisting. Iran is still financing Hizballah to the tune of millions of dollars each year, whilst Iraq is as antagonistic as ever, although contained at present by the American and British air forces. Iran is also developing a range of weapons including chemical, biological and conventional missiles capable of reaching much farther than Israel. It is a known fact that some 10,000 resident technicians from Russia are actively assisting in this work.

More significant is the animosity which is developing between the European Union and Israel. The most recent indication of this was the condemnation of Israel by the Court of Human Rights which drew a sharp response from the Israeli government.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

In the Millennium issue, the article entitled 'God's 7,000 year plan' revealed that the seventh millennial period will be the time when God is to re-establish the Kingdom of Israel and usher in a new age of peace and security for the world at the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. The writer quoted the words of Daniel [*Daniel 2.44 NKJV*]. This particular chapter tells us about the events that were going to occur from the time of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, some 600 years before Christ was born. It foretells the coming of three more world empires and subsequent events down to our own days (we referred to this prophecy in the first 'Millennium Update' - March/April 1999). From 603 BC in Nebuchadnezzar's era, those successive empires were, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. After Rome there followed a mixture of independent weak and strong nations which has been the case ever since the decline of the Roman empire. They were defined in Nebuchadnezzar's vision by a descending scale of values from the head of gold, then silver, brass (or bronze) and iron and finally the feet of iron mixed with clay [*Read Daniel 2.31-45*].

The return of Christ is represented by the stone striking the feet of the image (the weak and strong nations) to begin the task of establishing the kingdom of God in the seventh millennium as Jesus himself foretold [*Matthew 21.42-44*]. This

coincides with the deliverance of Israel from the nations who have invaded their land. We read of this event in Ezekiel's prophecy:

'After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, **against the mountains of Israel**, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee. Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land.' *[Ezekiel 38.8-12]*

It is apparent that the prophecy speaks of Israel today, when we realise that when the prophecy was given, the nation had been conquered by Babylon and enslaved for the second time in its history. The first time was the Egyptian enslavement at the time of Moses, which ended after 430 years with the Exodus from Egypt and the journey which eventually brought them to the land promised to their ancestor Abraham. Israel did not become a nation again until 1948 and therefore the prophetic invasion of Israel recorded above, is still future.

The prophet Ezekiel had indicated this threefold overthrow of God's people in an earlier chapter, when he outlined what would be the final outcome for the nation of God's choice. Ezekiel wrote of the time when Babylon was to overthrow Zedekiah the last king of Israel:

'And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, **until he come whose right it is**; and I will give it him.' *[Ezekiel 21.25-27]*

So Israel was to be overturned as a monarchy until God sends forth the one who has the right to take up the throne once more. Since the time of Babylon's destruction of Israel 2,600 years ago, the regathered nation declared as the State of Israel in 1948 **has never existed as a monarchy.**

It should also be noted that Israel is to suffer an invasion and the overthrow of the nation, followed by the restoration of the monarchy when God's appointed king will rule over them. We are told clearly in the Scriptures that this will be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The question then arises, what will motivate this northern group of nations spoken of in the opening verses of this chapter, [Ezekiel 38.1-7] to drive south against Israel? The Scriptures tell us that the motive will be to plunder the land [verse 12]. That said, is it unreasonable to think that if the risk of another war between the Jews and Arabs was to become a reality, those nations sympathetic to the Arab cause might well decide to intervene?

Why have the leaders of Serbia decided to carry out their recent actions? Why are so many nations intent on creating weapons of mass destruction? Why should one ethnic group so hate another? Why have the Jews endured such persecution? The Bible tells us that it all originates from man's disobedience to God. It was this very point that was made by the Apostle Paul to the believers at Rome:

'...according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, **to bring about the obedience of faith.**' [Romans 16.25,26 New RSV]

This is the lesson that both Jews and Gentiles need to learn from what has happened to Israel over the centuries. It is a fact that the Jews as God's chosen people, have suffered immeasurably as a result of their disobedience to God's commandments. The Scriptures, without fear or favour, record how the Jews have fared over the centuries, in accordance with their acceptance or rejection of God's requirements. Since the advent of Christ, those Jews and Gentiles who have embraced the gospel message are also subject to the same degree of responsibility.

THE EVIDENCE OF HISTORY

Where do these thoughts, together with the observations of what is currently going on in the world lead us, as we approach the turn of the century and this unique celebration of the millennium? Surely it is of supreme importance to all our readers, to search out whether the Scriptures are factually warning us of a

new order of things to be heralded in with, as the prophet Daniel indicated, '*a time of trouble, such as never was.*' [Daniel 12.1]

In the Millennium issue (September/October 1998 page 21) a picture is shown of the image described by Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar. [Daniel chapter 2]

It makes graphically clear the events that secular history proves conclusively to have been fulfilled, from 600 BC down to the present day. The one outstanding prophecy yet to be fulfilled, is the return of Christ to sit on the restored throne of David over Israel.

Daniel stated in that prophecy:

'And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.'

[Daniel 2.44,45]

The time of this final war in Israel is indicated in Luke's gospel record, where Jesus outlines that '*the times of the Gentiles*' will come to an end when Jerusalem is no longer trodden down of the Gentiles. [Luke 21.24] Although this time is still future, Israel has occupied the whole of Jerusalem since 1967 and we have already noted her statement that she will never give up her sovereign right to the city.

Luke then goes on to record:

'And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring.' [Luke 21.25]

In the first 'Millennium Update,' we drew attention to the alignment of planets expected in May 2000 and the possible effect on the earth as indicated by Dr Julian Salt. He showed that such an alignment had not taken place since the time of the creation 6,000 years ago, when similar effects undoubtably occurred as confirmed by the fossil evidence.

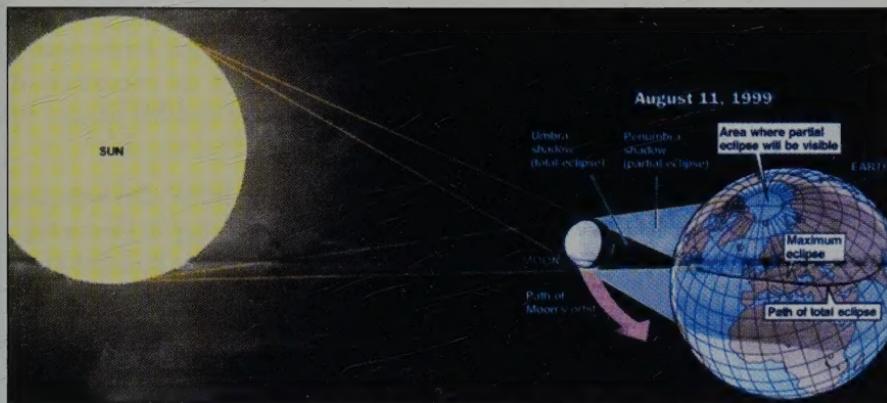


Diagram of typical eclipse (Courtesy of the Daily Telegraph)

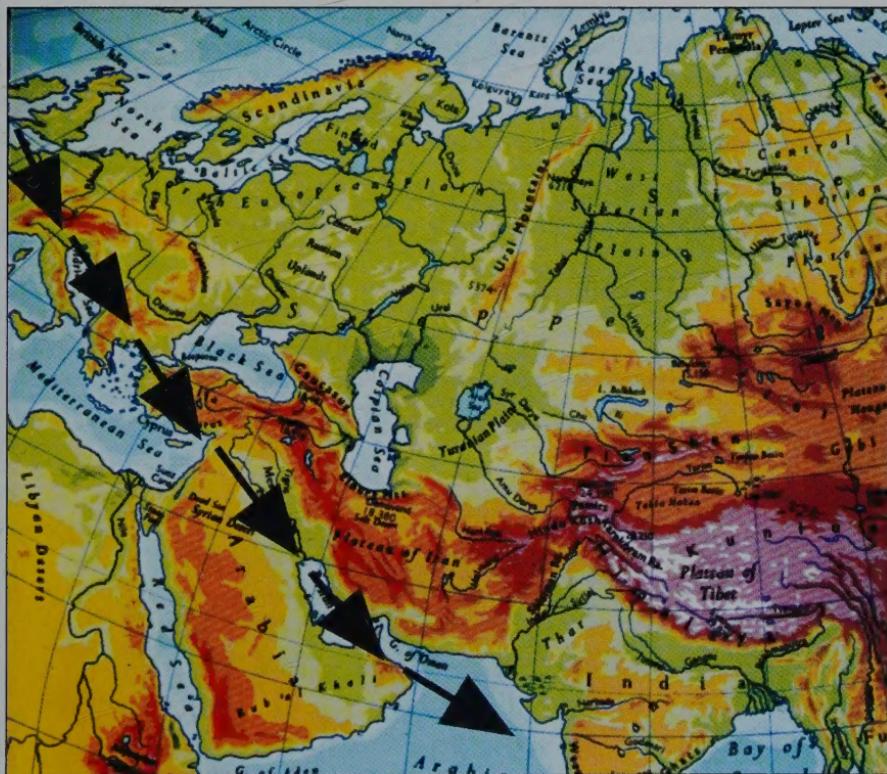


Diagram showing the route of the shadow of the eclipse on 11th August 1999, passing over all the nations and empires described in Daniel chapter 2.

Well not surprisingly, there is a further event that is to occur concerning the sun and the moon on 11th August, 1999. We are referring to the forth-coming eclipse of the Sun. If we consider this event in the light of the exposition of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar concerning the various empires and the nations of these latter days, it provides some intriguing thoughts.

In the U.K. the shadow of this last eclipse of the sixth Millennium will pass South of a line drawn between Newquay in Cornwall and Torbay in Devon but it doesn't end there. A Bible student colleague has observed that there are eight eclipses every decade, ie some 800 during this sixth millennium. He points out that this final eclipse will potentially be seen by tens of millions of people throughout Europe and Asia, which is a massive increase in the numbers that are normally able to view such an event. The real point of interest is, that if we extend the line from Cornwall in the U.K. through to Karachi in Pakistan, we can plot the area of a band of darkness which will occur during almost a three hour period, where the sun will be blotted out over every past empire and many latter day nations spoken of in Daniel's prophecy. The Scriptures link the withdrawal of light by the sun with the end of human rule and the return of Christ as God's appointed King. [See *Isaiah 13.9-11; Joel 3.15-17; Matthew 24.29,30*]

Is the final eclipse of this millennium a God-given sign to the discerning of the world, or like the alignment of the planets expected in May 2000 is it...

...just another coincidence?

Roy Hinkley
Kent, England

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